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BY FAX

February 9, 2009

Senator Toni Harp, Co-Chair  
Representative Tom Reynolds, Co-Chair  
Regulation and Protection Subcommittee of the Appropriations Committee  
Room 2700  
Legislative Office Building  
Hartford, CT 06016

RE: Governor Rell's budget proposal to eliminate the Office of the Healthcare Advocate

Dear Senator Harp, Representative Reynolds and Subcommittee Members:

I am sorry that we are not available to testify tonight before the subcommittee on Governor Rell's budget proposal to eliminate the Office of Healthcare Advocate.

We oppose eliminating the state healthcare advocate for two reasons:

1) The Office of the State Healthcare Advocate performs a unique function of helping consumers get access to or resolve issues with healthcare insurance. We have referred many people with arthritis to this office. There is not a comparable service on this scale available in another state agency or the private, nonprofit section. The attorneys and staff in the state healthcare advocate office specialize in helping your constituents and ours navigate the intricacies of health insurance policies. The state Insurance Department, by contrast, deals primarily with regulation of industry.

In addition, the Office has advised the General Assembly on numerous occasions on how public policy changes will affect access to health care in the state, including most recently opposing the Governor's Charter Oak Health Plan because it was specifically designed exclude those with chronic illnesses, like arthritis, in order to keep costs low. People with chronic disease represent 50% of those uninsured. They are most likely to have problems getting health care coverage or with policies that exclude coverage for certain conditions or treatments. With the large increase in unemployment, expected to top over 80,000 by latest estimates, the Office of the Healthcare Advocate is needed even more to help the unemployed assess available options for continuing or finding healthcare coverage.

2) Since it is funded by the insurance industry, eliminating the office will not save the general fund.

We respectfully request that your subcommittee recommend that the Office of Healthcare Advocate not be eliminated from the budget.

Sincerely,

Susan M. Nescl  
Chief Public Health & Policy Officer